

Checking in on our future

WHERE DO WE GROW FROM HERE?

JANUARY 2001

Information, please

Over the past months, many of you have expressed your opinions and ideas about the review of Clark County's Comprehensive Growth Management Plan. You have digested a wealth of information the county has provided and told us what you thought about a range of important issues.

The information and perspective you shared regarding potential policies has been critical in moving the process forward. During this process, members of our community have listened to and learned from each other. You have agreed on some issues and disagreed on others, emphasizing where there is consensus and where differences of opinion still remain.

Wrapping up the policy decisions

We are just completing the public input phase dealing with key policy options related to the comprehensive plan. To date, there have been about 80 hours of public meetings alone, as well as numerous presentations and discussions with various community groups. Add to that a public opinion survey, e-mails, and other written comments from residents.

What will happen to this input? All of it – from detailed meeting notes to every written comment sent to the county from the very beginning of the process – will be given to the Clark County Planning Commission and the Board of Clark County Commissioners for their consideration.

Joint public hearings

In wrapping up this phase, the planning commission and the county commissioners will hold joint hearings that provide additional opportunities for citizen input. The hearings are scheduled for the following dates.

- **Thursday, February 1**, 6:30 p.m., Hazel Dell Sewer District, 8000 NE 52nd Ct., Vancouver.
- **Thursday, February 8**, 6:30 p.m., Vancouver City Hall, 210 E. 13th St., Vancouver.
- **Thursday, February 22**, 6:30 p.m., La Center High School, 725 Highland Road, La Center.
- **Thursday, March 1**, 6:30 p.m., Camas Police Building, 2100 NE 3rd Ave., Camas.

Making the policy decisions

March 2001 – Following the joint hearings, the planning commission will forward its recommendations to the Board of Clark County Commissioners.

March/April 2001 – County commissioners will make final decisions on comprehensive plan policies.

Moving ahead

April 2001 through 2002 – County commissioners will make decisions on how to carry out any new policies. The comprehensive plan will be amended to implement these changes, including any changes to specific parcels of land.

What has the overall input told us so far?

Since the very beginning of the comprehensive plan review, citizens have readily offered their ideas and opinions. Two recent efforts to gather further input have provided additional information for decision-makers to consider.

CitizenSpeak II: This countywide assembly got down to the crux of the matter. Discussion focused on the decisions we have to make and the potential options already identified. The questions to participants were: How do you feel about each option? Have we missed any option? *More information about CitizenSpeak II is included below.*

Public opinion survey: While much of the input has come from citizens meeting with us, we also wanted to know what other people were thinking – people who might not send a letter, speak at a public hearing, or attend a neighborhood association meeting to make their views known. A public opinion survey was conducted to provide input from a broad cross-section of county residents. *More information about the survey is included on the back page.*

Looking at the public outreach process in its entirety, some clear messages have emerged.

Similar opinions on some issues

- Citizens are very concerned about population growth and its related impacts.
- Citizens want to increase local job opportunities and believe that housing and jobs need to be planned jointly.

- Citizens have a strong desire to ensure that the quality and nature of their neighborhoods is enhanced and protected as growth occurs. Ideas that have widespread support are neighborhood planning, standards and guidelines for the designs of new developments within neighborhoods, and citizen involvement in design review.

- Citizens want to retain clear distinctions between rural areas and urban areas. They don't agree, however, as to whether this necessarily means retaining current urban growth boundaries.

Different opinions on other issues

In contrast, opinions about how to manage growth vary widely. Here are some examples.

- Many people think that the same density standards and multi-family housing requirements should apply to each urban area. Others strongly support area-specific growth standards.
- Many people want to maintain or increase restrictions on growth outside the current urban growth areas. However, a significant number would like urban areas expanded – some because they feel that much of the current resource land is not viable as farm or forest land, and others because they would like less density in the urban areas.



CitizenSpeak II: What you told us

Seventy-five residents signed in at the Clark County Fairgrounds on November 9 to take part in CitizenSpeak II: A Countywide Assembly on the Comprehensive Growth Management Plan Review. The focus of the meeting was to review and solicit input on decisions related to five major policy areas:

- How much growth?
- Where to grow?
- How to grow/Housing?
- How to grow/Jobs?
- How do we make Clark County a desirable place to live?

Each decision had several potential options. Participants were asked to express their opinions on each of them. Support for the different options often varied widely. Here is a summary of the input.

What population forecast supplied by the state's Office of Financial Management will be used?

The population forecast used in the plan affects how we plan for our future.

There was scant support from participants for the low forecast. The high forecast amount of 587,622 received more support than the medium forecast.

How should projected population be allocated to each jurisdiction?

Many participants said that they did not want to keep using set percentages as a way of allocating county population to live in urban growth areas. Some preferred to allocate population based on growth rates of individual UGAs over the last ten years. Others favored basing the allocation on the amount of buildable residential lands in each UGA.

Should the plan continue to expect that 81 percent of new residential growth should occur in urban areas?

Limiting rural development to the current number of potential home sites was supported slightly more than opposed. Support varied greatly for keeping the 81 percent figure, for planning for more growth in urban areas, or for planning for more growth in rural areas.

Should we manage how urban reserves are developed to ensure they can transition to urban areas in the future?

Urban reserves are the areas just out-

side the urban growth boundary where any future boundary expansion will first occur. The majority of participants supported keeping urban reserves but doing more detailed planning for them. There were mixed opinions about rezoning the urban reserve areas and moving them into urban areas but not developing them until adequate services are available.

Should we continue to set targets at 60 percent single-family and 40 percent multi-family for new housing construction in all urban areas?

The majority did not support the existing 60/40 policy. There was significant support for setting separate targets based on a community's size and its current land uses, and there was some support for replacing the existing policy with affordable housing efforts.

Should we continue to plan for an average of 6 units per acre for new single-family detached housing and 16 units per acre for attached housing?

Participants disliked setting goals for an overall countywide density for all housing types. Ideas that would create more flexibility in setting density goals received a lot of support. This included

setting different goals for each urban area to achieve an overall countywide density, or establishing a tiered system designating average densities for cities and the unincorporated areas of UGAs based on their size.

How do we plan for new rural housing?

Allowing more home sites in rural centers received a great deal of support. Response was mixed for allowing zoning and the market to drive rural growth and for changing zoning to allow smaller minimum lot sizes.

How should we plan for job growth?

There was wide support for keeping current industrial/commercial zoning and actively promoting development of these areas. Opinions were mixed about increasing the amount of industrial/commercial lands designated in the comprehensive plan.

Where should job growth be directed?

Most participants supported increasing infrastructure investments in current industrial/commercial lands to bring them up to prime buildable status.

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What levels of service should be planned for capital facilities such as roads, parks, water, sewer, schools, etc.

Participants favored planning for high levels of service rather than for lower, more affordable levels of service.

How do we plan in a way that addresses state and federal environmental laws?

The majority of participants supported making environmental protection a county priority rather than doing the minimum to meet state and federal environmental standards.

What role should design standards play in addressing such things as the exterior appearance of structures, landscaping, etc.?

There was a great deal of support for developing countywide design standards. Most participants liked the idea of providing neighborhoods with the

opportunity to help develop design standards that apply specifically to their areas.

Two decisions get closer scrutiny

CitizenSpeak participants selected two key decisions to review in depth: urban growth boundaries and neighborhood involvement.

Urban growth boundaries

A critical decision is whether to change the thresholds for expanding urban growth boundaries, which are the lines showing the projected growth area around each city. The comprehensive plan says that boundaries can be moved only if development has occurred on 75 percent of buildable residential or commercial land, or 50 percent of industrial land within a UGB.

Rather than setting strict 75 or 50 percent thresholds, there was somewhat more support for relying on a 20-year

population forecast. In this approach, decisions about moving boundaries would be based on the amount of land available for development and whether it was sufficient for the number of people expected to live in the area in 20 years.

Participants also liked these alternative approaches for deciding when and where boundaries should be moved:

- Determine the amount of services we can afford to provide and permit boundaries to extend only as far as those services allow.
- Let each urban area develop its own rules for moving UGBs.
- Set the boundaries by using other considerations, such as maintaining the community's character, rather than using straight percentage ratios.

Involving neighborhoods

There was substantial support for developing proactive processes for neigh-

borhood-based planning, enhancing neighborhoods' role as an official part of the process. Although the county provides neighborhoods with planning notification, currently they must take the initiative to become involved rather than having their input formally solicited.

Much of the discussion dealt with improving outreach strategies and revising land-use processes to bolster neighborhood decision-making. Generally, participants agreed that neighborhood involvement in planning issues is important.

Detailed notes of input from CitizenSpeak II can be viewed on the county's web site at www.co.clark.wa.us/ComDev/LongRange/CompReview/appendix.pdf or through the home page at www.co.clark.wa.us. They can also be obtained by calling (360)397-2375 ext. 4993.

Hearing from others: Independent public opinion survey

Clark County commissioned a professional research firm to conduct a scientific random-sample survey on key comprehensive plan issues. Here are some of the survey's major findings.

Planning for business and industry

There was strong support for business and industrial development. Eighty percent of those surveyed thought it was important to increase opportunities for local residents to work in Clark County. More than 70 percent supported locating jobs close to residential areas throughout the county.

Clear urban and rural distinctions

Four out of five respondents supported maintaining a clear dividing line between rural areas and urban areas.

Rural development

Limiting rural growth to the current number of potential home sites was preferred by 56 percent of the respondents. This could allow for rural population to increase from 62,000 today to about 102,000. Thirty-five percent thought the county should consider changes to allow more home sites and more people in rural areas.

Residential housing

More than half the respondents, 53 percent, agreed that all of the county's cities should be held to the same standard in planning for single- and multi-family housing regardless of what the particular standard is.

Development patterns

The density of new development is a major question in planning for increased population. In urban areas, most new single-family developments have homes on lots of about 6,000 square feet, which results in 5 to 6 homes per acre. When asked about a range of development patterns, 39 percent favored additional single-family homes on larger lots, even if that may require expansion of the urban area or more multi-family housing to handle population increases. The next most popular response (21 percent) was to continue with five to six homes per acre in newly developed areas.

Making higher densities more acceptable

Accommodating our projected population means that densities in some areas may need to increase. To make higher densities more acceptable in their neighborhoods, residents strongly supported measures to help new developments blend in with existing homes. Choices included neighborhood associations being able to influence design and landscaping features (33 percent), building styles and materials having to be similar to existing homes (25 percent), and/or new housing having to meet city and county design and landscaping standards (19 percent).

Survey results send mixed messages

On a number of issues, the survey results show general agreement, providing decision-makers with a sense of direction. On other issues, the findings show a range of views. Still other opinions drawn from the survey are inconsistent with each other, illustrating some of the planning challenges that lie ahead. For instance, the clear urban and rural distinctions supported by 80 percent of the respondents may not be easy to maintain along with larger lot sizes, favored by 39 percent, which could push growth farther out.

The entire survey can be viewed on the county's web site at www.co.clark.wa.us/ComDev/LongRange/CompReview/survey.pdf or through the home page at www.co.clark.wa.us. It can also be obtained by calling (360)397-2375 ext. 4993.



Collaboration with cities continues

All of the cities within Clark County are revisiting their own land-use plans, which will be folded into the plan for the county. The cities' plans must be consistent with countywide planning policies, including any new policies adopted by the county commissioners.

To help coordinate the county-city efforts, a steering committee of the county commissioners and elected officials from each city meet monthly to discuss issues involving multiple jurisdictions. These meetings will continue until the county commissioners take final action on the policy options under review.

For information about the cities' planning activities, please contact:

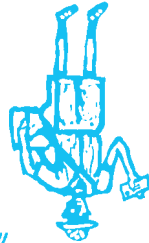
- Battle Ground - Eric Holmes 342-5045
- Camas - Martin Snell 834-3451
- La Center - Mayor Elizabeth Cervený 263-1154
- Ridgefield - Mayor Tim Thompson 887-3557
- Vancouver - Bryan Snodgrass 735-8873 ext. 8195
- Washougal - Monty Anderson 835-8501
- Woodland - Steve Langdon 225-8281
- Yacolt - Mayor Jim Robertson 686-3922

Checking in on our future
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- **Web site:** Through Clark County's home page at www.co.clark.wa.us. Click on "Comprehensive Growth Management Plan Review" under "What's New."
- **Information line:** (360)397-2375 ext. 4993; TDD (360)397-6057.
- **E-mail:** compplan@co.clark.wa.us. Please send us your name and e-mail address if you would like to be added to our e-mail list.
- **Mailing address:** Comprehensive Plan, P.O. Box 9810, Vancouver, WA 98666.
- **Columbian Info-Line** (for recorded information about upcoming activities): (360)699-6000, mailbox 3632.
- **Speakers:** Call or e-mail us if you would like a speaker to talk to your group about comprehensive plan issues. All you need to do is supply the place and the audience.



You can obtain information or contact us in the following ways:

More information is available